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THE ORIGIN OF MORMONISM,

By Mrs. Dr. Horace Eaton, of Palmyra, N. Y.

Dear Sisters.—A ride of less than three hours on the New York Central, due east, will bring you to the town of Palmyra, in the vicinity of which, the system of Mormonism was initiated. In this town it has been my privilege to reside for the last thirty-two years. I speak to you from credible testimony. Western New York has strong soil and rank weeds are incidental to strong soil. We must own the deceivers. "They went out from us, but they were not of us." The deceived were elsewhere.

As far as Mormonism was connected with its reputed founder, Joseph, always called "Joe Smith," it had its origin *in the brain and heart of an ignorant, deceitful mother.* Joe Smith's mother moved in the lowest walks of life, but she had a kind of mental power, which her son shared. With them both, the imagination was the commanding faculty. It was "vain" but vivid. To it was subsidized reason, conscience, truth. Both mother and son were noted for a habit of extravagant assertion. They would look a listener full in the eye, and without confusion or blanching, would fluently improvise startling statements and exciting stories, the warp and woof of which were alike sheer falsehood. Was an inconsistency alluded to, nothing daunted, a subterfuge was always at hand. As one old man, who knew them well, said to me, "You could'nt face them down. They'd lie and stick to it." Many of the noblest specimens of humanity have arisen from a condition of honest poverty; but few of these from one of dishonest poverty. Agur apprehended the danger when he said, "lest I be poor and steal." Mrs. Smith used to go to the houses of the village, and do family washings. But if the articles were left to dry upon the lines and not secured by their owners before midnight, the washer was often the winner—and in these nocturnal depredations she was assisted by her boys, who favored in like manner poultry yards and grain bins. Her son Joe never worked save at chopping bees and raisings, and then whisky was the impetus and the reward. The mother of the high-priest of Mormonism was superstitious to the last degree. The very air she breathed was inhabited by "familiar spirits that peeped and wizards that muttered." She turned many a penny by tracing in the lines of the open palm the fortunes of the inquirer. All ominous signs were heeded. No work was commenced on Friday. The moon over the left shoulder portended calamity; the breaking of a mirror, death. Even in the old Green Mountain State, before the family immigrated to the Genesee country, the then West, Mrs. Smith's mind was made up that one of her sons should be a prophet. The weak father agreed with her that Joseph was the "genus" of their nine children. So it was established that Joseph should be the prophet. To such an extent did the mother impress this idea upon the boy, that all the instincts of childhood were restrained. He rarely smiled or laughed. "His looks and thoughts were always downward bent." He never indulged in demonstrations of fun, since they would not be in keeping with the profound dignity of his allotted vocation. His mother inspired and aided him in every scheme of duplicity and cunning. All acquainted with the facts agree in saying that the evil spirit of Mormonism dwelt first in Joe Smith's mother.

Bad books had much to do with the origin of Mormonism. Joe Smith could read. He could not write. His two standard volumes were "The Life of Stephen Burroughs," the clerical scoundrel, and the autobiography of Capt. Kidd, the pirate. This latter work was eagerly and often perused. There was a fascination to him in the charmed lines:

> "My name was Robert Kidd,
> As I sailed, as I sailed,
> And most wickedly I did,
> And God's laws I did forbid,
> As I sailed, as I sailed."

At the early age of fifteen, while watching his father digging a well, Joe espied a stone of curious shape. It must have borne resemblance to the stone foot of Buddha, which Mrs House tells us of at Bankok, Siam. All the difference, this was smaller, like a child's foot. At any rate, it has left footprints on the sands of time. "This little stone was the acorn of the Mormon-oak." This was the famous Palmyra "seer" or "peek stone," with which Joseph Smith did most certainly divine. Being before instructed of his mother, he immediately set up a claim to miraculous power. In a kneeling posture, with a bandage on

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his eyes, so luminous was the sight without it, with the stone in a large white stove-pipe hat, and this hat in front of his face, he saw things unutterably wonderful. He could reveal, full too well, the place where stolen property, or wandering flocks could be found. Caskets of gold stored away by the Spaniards, or by his hero, the redoubtable Captain Kidd, coffers of gems, oriental treasures, the "wealth of Ormus and of Ind," gleamed beneath the ground in adjacent fields and woodlands. Digging became the order of the night, and sleep that of the day. Father and brothers, decayed neighbors, all who could be hired with cider or strong drink, were organized into a digging phalanx. They sallied forth in the darkness. Solemn ceremonies prefaced the work. Not a sod was disturbed by the spades, till Joe's mystic wand, the witch hazel, guided by the sacred stone, pointed out the golden somewhere. Entire silence was one condition of success. When hours had passed, and the answering thud on the priceless chest was about to strike the ear, some one, in a rapture of expectancy, always broke the spell by speaking, the riches were spirited away to another quarter, and the digging must be resumed another night. Thus matters went on for some seven or eight years. Little or no attention was paid to the performances of Smith near his home. Lovers of the marvelous from other towns now and then came in to see and hear some new thing. People from greater distances visited the several excavations and wondered. Newspapers heralded and ridiculed. But so far it amounted to nothing, unless it created a certain atmosphere heavy with myth and mystery, favorable to future developments.

The perseverance of Joe Smith was equal to his audacity. Both were boundless. But he alone could never have wrought out the institution of Mormonism. Here we have "black spirits, red spirits and gray." Early in the summer of 1827 a "mysterious stranger" seeks admitance to Joe Smith's cabin. The conferences of the two are most private. This person, whose coming immediately preceded a new departure in the faith, was Sidney Rigdon, a backsliding clergyman, at this time a Campbellite preacher in Mentor, Ohio. Now we have "a literary genius behind the screen." Rigdon was versatile in his gifts, had a taste for theological and scientific discussion, was shrewd, wily, deep and withal utterly unprincipled. Soon after his appearance on the stage, Mormonism begins to assume "a local habitation and a name." Now the angel talks more definitely to Smith, tells him all his sins are pardoned, that none of the sects are accepted of God as his church, but that he shall establish one the Almighty will own; that the North American Indians are a remnant of the Israelites; that hidden beneath the ground are their inspired writings: that these are to be intrusted to him, and to him only, as none other can see them and live. In the stillness of night Smith seeks alone his hill-top of Curmorah, an eminence four miles south of Palmyra, eight north of Canandaigua. Confronted by the very pyrotechnics of Piuto, he averred that he obtained from that place a series of golden plates, on which were written in hieroglyphics, the records so important in the new dispensation. Accompanying the plates is a pair of huge spectacles, the Urim and Thummim, by the aid of which the tablets are to become available. He soon finds it convenient to visit relatives in Pennsylvania, in which state, Rigdon was then sojourning. After a while he returns with an accurate translation. He appeals to the cupidity of a rich farmer, a semi-monomaniac, and prevails upon him to mortgage his estate to pay for the printing. Here is a copy taken off in sheets from the first edition, kindly loaned me by Major John Gilbert, of Palmyra, the venerable printer, who finished the work in 1830.

But who wrote the book? Surely not Smith or Rigdon. We will go back to the time when Joe Smith lay in his cradle in Sharon, Vt. In 1809, a Congregational minister, Rev. Solomon Spaulding, a graduate of Dartmouth College, left his native state of Vermont, sojourned awhile in ours, and then sought the more genial climate of Conneaut, Ashtabula County, Ohio. He was obliged by the state of his health to abandon preaching. The cast of his mind was peculiar. He often diverted himself by writing romances on different subjects. The mounds of that section of Ohio then attracted much attention. Mr. Spaulding was intensely interested in their study, and even opened up one near his own dwelling. He adopted the theory that these mounds were evidences of the existence of an extinct race, higher in the scale than the American aborigines. He wrote a story in Biblical phraseology, delineating in a fanciful manner the wanderings, wars, exploits, and fate of this primeval people. He afterward removed to Pittsburgh, Pa. Some said to him as John Bunyan's friends to the dreamer, "Print it." He left it with a publisher in Pittsburgh by the name of Patterson. For some reason it never went to press. After three years it was returned to its author, who died in 1816. Without doubt, Mr. Spaulding's romance, entitled "The Manuscript Found" is the Golden Bible, or Book of Mormon.*

But how came Rigdon or Smith, or both, in the possession of Mr. Spaulding's book? Here we have not absolute certainty. There were two or three ways in which the men and the book could have been brought together. This is common to each—by theft.

Smith was at one time servant or teamster in the family of William H. Sabine Esq., the brother of Mrs. Spaulding, and could easily have had access to this manuscript in an

* See SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY, August, 1880.

unlocked trunk in the garret of Mr. Sabine's house. It is generally believed however that Rigdon, while a journeyman printer in the office of Patterson, copied Mr. Spaulding's story: that by some means he heard of Smith, knew his man even at a distance, and was sure Smith's idiosyncrasies would just file in with his own purpose of carrying out a foul and lucrative imposture. There was a ubiquitous tin peddler in those days by the name of Parley P. Pratt. He knew everybody in Western New York and Northern Ohio. He was a member of Rev. Sidney Rigdon's church in Mentor, Ohio. Perhaps Pratt was the carrier-vulture who told Rigdon of the money digger, Smith.

The mildest criticism that can be passed upon Mr. Spaulding's fancy sketch is, that the interest is not well sustained, and that it indicates the languor and hectic of the physical decline of its author. But it is hardly fair to speak of the intellectual merits of a book which was, without question, grossly altered by Rigdon and Smith to adapt it to the code of the Latter Day Saints. When new commands were given by the angel, whether to institute the order of the priesthood of Melchizedek, or to engraft on the system permission for the polygamous or the spiritual marriage, Rigdon's pen was ever ready to issue the encyclical, similating Mr. Spaulding's Hebraic idioms.

Mormonism fairly started, Smith prophesied, Rigdon and Pratt preached, Cowdery baptized, Harris paid. But no prophet is accepted in his own country. Converts came in tardily. The angel said, "Move forward to Kirtland, Ohio." This was near Rigdon's old parish. From this place they were soon expelled by the righteous indignation of an outraged people. Is there any significance in the fact that the Ohio Mormon encampment was located but a few miles from the home of our beloved President Garfield? Had their disgraceful career in his state anything to do with the manly words of the inaugural? Our President "knoweth of these things. We are persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him." God grant that he may have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this."

Those who originated Mormonism now stand before the tribunal of that Being who has threatened to "silence lying lips." In 1844, Joe Smith, when but thirty-six years old, was assassinated in Nauvoo, Ill. Parley P. Pratt died in the same manner in Arkansas in 1856 or 1857. After Smith's decease, Rigdon naturally aspired to the dictatorship. But he was defeated by Brigham Young, was expelled from the church and given over by Brigham to the buffetings of Satan. Rigdon has since died, as far as we know without penitence or confession.

An apology might be offered for the above puerile and revolting statements were they not connected with the beginning of the institution of Mormonism, which, as another has remarked, "presents a problem which the wisest politician has failed to solve, and whose outcome lies in the mystery of the future."

One thought more—and it is a solemn one—*Mormonism may have risen from neglect on the part of Christian workers.* We have no knowledge of the religious influences thrown around the Smith family when living in Vermont. At twelve years of age Joe came to Palmyra, and should have been immediately secured in one of its Sabbath schools. As far we can learn, not any of the family were invited cordially, heartily to the house of God. Some of them strolled in occasionally. But no persistent effort was made to induce them to become regular attendants. The children were not repeatedly visited, clothed or helped to clothe themselves that they might attend the Sabbath school. And this in a community distinguished for the godliness of its early settlers. Had they expressed to the visitor a preference for a denomination other than his own, he should promptly and honorably have given over their names and locality to the pastor of the church of their choice.

Depend upon it, there were redeeming traits somewhere even in this family. Joseph Smith's mother was not a malignant woman. She knew the virtues of remedial roots and herbs, and was ever ready to administer and assist when her lowly neighbors were sick or dying. But ladies of piety and culture never visited Mrs. Smith in her home in a sequestered neighborhood two or three miles from the village, never sat down by her side, and, in an *unpatronizing manner*, sympathized with her in her many cares and labors, wisely dropped a word of friendly advice, supplied the family with reading for the week days and the Sabbath days, and by all possible methods made them feel that *they loved their souls.* No male member of the church halted as he passed the door of the rude, unpainted house on a Sabbath morning, and found room in his capacious family carriage or sleigh for any of the little or big Smiths, that they might go up to the temple of the Lord, and learn to worship there. To the inquiry, "Why was not more done to win them to a better life," I received this reply,—"Oh, they were such an awful family. Nobody wanted to go there. Nobody could. Why, they were the torment and the terror of the neighborhood." Our beloved Master *"came to seek and to save that which was lost.* They said of Him, *" He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner."* He was not ashamed or afraid to touch with His hand—mark, with His hand—the demoniac and the leper. Had His dear children in early day reached out theirs to this poor, outcast household, possibly this terrible ulcer of Mormonism might not now be corroding into the very vitals of the nation's purity and life.

The women of the Synods of Western New York are doing much for Utah. Aware that the poisonous virus went out from us, we feel that there is a relevancy, a fitness in our following it with the counteracting, neutralizing, healing antidote, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in this work we are assured we have the co-operation of the women of our entire church.

This is of a kind, dear sisters, that goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting. Prof. Coyner, our missionary at Salt Lake City, thus analyzes it. "Mormonism is made up of twenty parts. Take eight parts diabolism, three parts of animalism from the Mohammedan system, one part bigotry from old Judaism, four parts cunning and treachery from Jesuitism, two parts Thuggism from India and two parts Arnoldism, and then shake the mixture over the fires of animal passion and throw in the forms and ceremonies of the Christian religion and you will have this system in its true component elements." It numbers over 200,000. Its Book of Mormon is translated into many tongues. It has eighty two churches in Great Britain and 7000 converts in the Sandwich Islands. There are proselytes in every clime. Its representative has been honored in the halls of Congress and has a defence in the *North American Review*.

For the sake of our bewildered, deluded sisters, snared in an evil time, for the sake of the country we love, let us labor and pray and give for Utah.

We are encouraged to work for the speedy overthrow of this gigantic bulwark from the very nature of its origin. Its basis is not truth but falsehood. Every stone cries out of its wall "Deceit, deceit." Every beam out of its timber answers back, "deceit." May the words of a true prophet be fulfilled without blood, by the breath of Jehovah's mouth and the brightness of His coming.—"Because they have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, 'The Lord saith,' and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word—therefore mine hand shall be against the prophets that see vanity and divine lies, because, even because they have seduced my people. And one built up a wall and others daubed it with untempered mortar. Therefore, saith the Lord God, I will even rend the wall with a stormy wind in my fury. So I will break down the wall and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered. And it shall fall. And I will say unto you, the wall is no more neither they that daubed it."

NOTE.—The above History was read by Mrs. Dr. Eaton at the Union Home Missionary Meeting, held at Buffalo, N. Y., May 27th, 1881, over which Mrs. J. L. Graham of New York presided. It is now published by the *Woman's Executive Committee of Home Missions*, of which Mrs. Ashbel Green is President.

The fact that in this 19th Century, a delusion as wicked as it is patent, should spread itself "like a green bay-tree," not alone through Utah, but into adjacent Territories, where already it begins to control the elections, shows what the power of Satan still is in the world,

Patriotism dies away under the shadow of Mormonism. On that sad day, July 2nd, 1881, when grief, elsewhere paralyzing and universal, welded us into a Nation, into a Union indeed, there were demonstrations of joy in Salt Lake City.

Is there not need of prompt, vigorous action in order to destroy, at its very roots, a tree, known by such fruit? Experience proves that let the minds and hearts of children be preempted by truth, error then cannot long maintain a foot-hold. To this end, let more christian schools be quickly and quietly established wherever Mormonism now prevails. This can be done by the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, so far as the women of the Church provide the means for such extension. An average outlay of $600 the first year, with salary of teacher, is needed at each station. This can be divided between several societies.

For information in detail as to the places where a chapel-school-room must be provided, and the support of a teacher assured, apply to Mrs. F. E. H. Haines, 23 Centre street, New York City, P. O. Box 3863. Money, where no Presbyterial nor Synodical Society is organized, may be sent direct to Mrs. M. E. Boyd, address at office as above given.

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